WEEK THREE: TYPES OF CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES

Introduction

As we have learnt in the previous lectures, classification is the process of arranging library materials according to their subjects, while a classification scheme provides the framework and notations for doing this. However, it is important to note that not all classification schemes are the same. Over the years, various schemes have been developed to meet different needs, sizes, and types of libraries.

Generally, classification schemes can be grouped into two broad categories:

1. **General classification schemes**, which attempt to cover the whole field of human knowledge.
2. **Subject or special classification schemes**, which focus on specific disciplines or fields of study.

In this lecture, we shall discuss these two types, examine their examples, and highlight their advantages and disadvantages.

General Classification Schemes

A **general classification scheme** is one that aims to organise all fields of human knowledge. It provides notations for every known subject, from science to religion, from technology to literature, and so on.

Such schemes are designed for use in libraries that have collections covering many disciplines — for example, public libraries, national libraries, and university libraries.

The main purpose of a general classification scheme is to create a **universal structure of knowledge** that can be applied to any subject or material, no matter its area.

Features of General Classification Schemes

1. They cover all branches of human knowledge.
2. They are hierarchical — arranged from general to specific.
3. They use either numbers, letters, or a combination as notation.
4. They are flexible and regularly revised to accommodate new areas of knowledge.
5. They are widely accepted and used internationally.

Examples of General Classification Schemes

Let us now examine some of the most popular general schemes.

a. Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)

The **Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)** is the most widely used general scheme in the world. It was developed by **Melvil Dewey** in **1876**.

The DDC divides all knowledge into **ten main classes**, each represented by a three-digit number. Each main class is further divided into ten divisions, and each division into ten sections, creating a decimal structure.

The Ten Main Classes of DDC are:

Class Subject Area

000 General works, Computer science, Information
100 Philosophy and Psychology
200 Religion
300 Social Sciences
400 Language
500 Science
600 Technology (Applied sciences)
700 Arts and Recreation
800 Literature
900 History and Geography

Each of these classes can be subdivided for more specific subjects.
For instance, under **500 (Science)**, we have:

510 – Mathematics

520 – Astronomy

530 – Physics

540 – Chemistry

550 – Earth sciences

The **strengths of DDC** include its simplicity, logical structure, and wide acceptance globally. However, it sometimes faces criticism for being Western-centred and for not adequately representing African and indigenous knowledge systems.

b. Library of Congress Classification (LCC)

The **Library of Congress Classification (LCC)** was developed in **1904** by the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., under the direction of **Herbert Putnam**.

LCC was designed to suit the needs of a large research library. Unlike DDC which uses only numbers, LCC uses an **alphanumeric system** — a combination of **letters and numbers**.

Main Classes in LCC include:

Class Subject Area

A	General Works
B	Philosophy, Psychology, Religion
C	Auxiliary Sciences of History
D	World History
E–F	American History
G	Geography, Anthropology, Recreation
H	Social Sciences
J	Political Science
K	Law
L	Education
M	Music
N	Fine Arts
P	Language and Literature
Q	Science
R	Medicine
S	Agriculture
T	Technology
U	Military Science
V	Naval Science
Z	Bibliography, Library Science, Information Resources

Each letter represents a broad subject, which is then subdivided with numbers to show specific topics.
For instance, **Q** (Science) can have **QA** for Mathematics, **QC** for Physics, **QD** for Chemistry, and so on.

Advantages of LCC:

It is detailed and suitable for large academic libraries.

It allows expansion as knowledge grows.

It uses both letters and numbers, making notations compact and precise.

However, **LCC** may be complex for smaller libraries and is not as universally applied as DDC.

c. Universal Decimal Classification (UDC)

The **Universal Decimal Classification (UDC)** was developed in **1895** by **Paul Otlet** and **Henri La Fontaine** in Belgium.
It was derived from the DDC but adapted for international and scientific use.

UDC uses **numbers** like DDC but introduces **punctuation marks** (such as colons, slashes, and brackets) to express complex relationships between subjects.

For example:

622.33:658 means *management of mining operations*.

621.3/.6 means *electricity and magnetism*.

Advantages:

It is very detailed and flexible.

It is suitable for scientific and technical information.

However, **UDC** can be complex for beginners and is not as commonly used in public libraries.

d. Bliss Bibliographic Classification (BC)

Developed by **Henry Evelyn Bliss** between **1929 and 1953**, this scheme is based on the logical order of knowledge and the relationships between subjects.
It is known for its **intellectual clarity** and for reflecting the actual structure of disciplines.

Though it is not widely used in Nigeria, it is still applied in some academic libraries in Europe.

e. Colon Classification (CC)

The **Colon Classification**, developed by **S. R. Ranganathan** in **1933**, is also a general classification scheme.
It is unique because it is **faceted**, meaning that subjects are broken down into their basic elements or facets using the PMEST formula:

P – Personality (the main focus of the subject)

M – Matter (what the subject is made of)

E – Energy (the action or process)

S – Space (location)

T – Time (period)

For example, a book on *the production of cotton in Nigeria in the 21st century* could be represented as:
Cotton (P): Production (E): Nigeria (S): 21st century (T)

Ranganathan used colons (:) to connect these facets, hence the name *Colon Classification*.

Although complex, it introduced great innovation to knowledge organisation by allowing flexibility and the creation of compound subjects.

Subject or Special Classification Schemes

A **subject classification scheme** (also called a **special classification scheme**) is one that focuses on a particular field or discipline. It does not attempt to cover all human knowledge but only a limited area in great detail.

Such schemes are mainly used in **special libraries**, such as law libraries, medical libraries, agricultural libraries, and engineering libraries, where materials are confined to one area of study.

Features of Subject Schemes

They cover only one subject area.

They provide detailed and specific divisions within that field.

They are simpler to use within their domain.

They are tailored to the needs of specialists and professionals.

Examples of Subject Schemes

Moys Classification Scheme for Law (developed by Elizabeth Moys in 1968) — used mainly in law libraries.

National Library of Medicine (NLM) Classification — used in medical libraries.

Chemical Abstracts Service (CAS) — for chemistry and related sciences.

Agricultural Classification Scheme — used in agricultural research libraries.

Moys Scheme for Law, for instance, is an adaptation of the LCC but rearranged to suit legal subjects better. It includes divisions for jurisprudence, constitutional law, criminal law, property law, and so on.

Differences Between General and Subject Classification Schemes

S/N	General Schemes	Subject Schemes
1	Cover all fields of knowledge	Cover only one subject area

S/N	General Schemes	Subject Schemes
2	Used in public, national, and academic libraries	Used in special libraries
3	Examples include DDC, LCC, UDC	Examples include Moys, NLM, CAS
4	Complex but broad	Simple but detailed within scope
5	Suitable for multidisciplinary collections	Suitable for specialised collections

Summary

Classification schemes are broadly divided into **general** and **subject-specific** types. General schemes such as DDC, LCC, UDC, Bliss, and Colon Classification cover all fields of knowledge and are commonly used in large and academic libraries.
Subject schemes, on the other hand, are restricted to a particular discipline and provide detailed breakdowns of concepts within that field.

Every library chooses the scheme that best suits its nature, size, and user community. For instance, a university library may use DDC or LCC, while a law library may prefer the Moys scheme.

Assignment

Discuss three advantages and three disadvantages of using general schemes in African libraries.